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ABSTRACT

This paper contains an overview of policy decisions being made at the state and national levels about learning assistance activities in higher education and developmental education. The principles driving those decisions are also outlined. Some policymakers want to fine the high schools from which under prepared students have graduated; others want to make individual students pay more for developmental education courses. Policymakers in many states believe that the national movement for increased requirements for high school graduation has eliminated or lessened the need for postsecondary academic support and developmental courses. Economic factors are most frequently cited as reasons to reduce or cut developmental course offerings and academic assistance programs, and policy decisions are being driven by some beliefs about developmental education. One such belief is that developmental education is equivalent to affirmative action, a belief that is not true. Nor is it true that developmental education courses water down the academic standards of all courses on campus. Raising admission standards will not eliminate the need for academic assistance and developmental studies, since faculty expectations rise with rising standards, and students will continue to need academic support. It is false to assume that developmental education and academic support programs cost too much; the cost of ignorance and dropouts is much higher. It is also not correct to assume that the temporary increase in the total number of high school graduates means that developmental students are no longer a high priority for recruitment and retention. Nor is it cost-effective to assume that all developmental course work can occur at the two-year college level. The massive education cuts resulting from the federal budget crisis mean that individual institutions will need to develop relationships with their state departments of education in order to pursue the limited grant dollars available. Responding to the current education environment is going to require commitment by developmental educators, commitment that might be advanced by the seven principles of Steven Covey's book "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People." (SLD)

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Trends in Developmental Education

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Trends in Developmental Education

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The U.S. press is filled with news reports detailing attempts and actions by postsecondary institutions and state and national policy makers to limit or eliminate learning assistance activities and developmental education courses, especially at the four-year college level. An overview of principles driving the current educational environment is needed. Following is an overview of policy decisions being made on the state and national level with the principles driving those decisions.

Overview of Policies at the Institutional, State and National Level

Many federal education grant programs that have historically provided grants to establish and nurture learning assistance centers will soon end. An example of a program that will probably be phased out is the Title III Strengthening Institutions grant program. It has been the most important program for establishing campus-wide learning assistance programs. TRIO programs will face increased scrutiny and funding battles over the next few years as a massive multimillion dollar national evaluation study is conducted concerning the effectiveness of its programs.

Seeking a party to blame, some policy makers want to fine the high schools from which they graduated. Plans are being considered in Florida, Montana, New Jersey, Washington, and West Virginia to require a high school district to pay for the cost of providing developmental course work at a state institution. Casper College in Wyoming has already implemented such a plan.

Seeking a party to blame, some policy makers wish to make individual students pay more for developmental education courses. Florida is considering a policy to require that students who enroll for a third time in developmental courses pay the "true" cost of the course so that state funds are not used to subsidize it. Since student tuition traditionally only pays for one-third the cost of instruction, this policy would require that developmental courses be charged at a rate as high as three times that of college-level courses.

Policy makers in many states believe that the national movement for increased requirements for high school graduation has eliminated or lessened the need for postsecondary academic support and developmental courses. For example, Georgia's Boards of Regents have recently approved policies that will raise admissions standards and reduce enrollments in developmental studies at both the two and four-year level.

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The need to cut or redirect the budget is the most often cited reason to reduce or eliminate developmental course offerings and academic assistance programs. Rather than banning developmental courses directly, some states plan to indirectly eliminate them through financial starvation by refusing to provide individual institutions the traditional state reimbursements for credit hours or head count generated through the courses. Policy makers within the 22 campus California State University system wish to end all developmental education. Even though the CSU system admits only the top one third of graduating high school students, 60 percent of incoming first year students fail placement exams and enroll in various remedial courses. Eliminating developmental studies courses would save $10 million, less than 1 percent of the system's operating budget. Proponents of the plan say that CSU cannot effectively "fix" the mistakes created by local school districts.

Some institutions want to limit the scope of developmental education course offerings by limiting them to the first twelve months of enrollment at the institution. City College of New York and the California State University system has proposed that if developmental courses are offered to entering students, they must be successfully completed within the first year of enrollment. Students would not be allowed to enroll in developmental courses after twelve months of attending the institution.

Reports that the state coordinating boards of higher education from many states wish to shift all developmental education courses out of four-year colleges to the two-year college system. Some four-year institutions are already subcontracting developmental course work that is conducted on their campus to a neighboring community college. Examples include Northern Arizona University and Iowa State University.

Beliefs and Trends Driving Specific Actions

The previously mentioned individual actions stem from beliefs and trends that have become prominent with the national education scene.

Belief #1. Developmental education is viewed by some as another form of affirmative action. ***False.*** With the current fervor by some to eliminate affirmative action and its proactive programs, it is untrue to cast developmental education's target population as students of color. Developmental studies have existed for more than 100 years at some of the nation's most prestigious campuses. And far before those campuses regularly admitted students of color or of low socioeconomic status. TRIO supporters have noted that 42 percent of their program participants are white, 35 percent are African-American, 15 percent are Hispanic and 4 percent each are Native American and Asian.

Belief #2. Developmental education courses help to water down the academic standards of all courses on campus. ***False.*** Dr. Hunter Boylan from the National Center for Developmental Education stated, "Those who work in developmental programs determine neither admission

criteria nor set academic standards. These are done by admissions officers, administrators, faculty committees, and state higher education executive offices. Once these standards are set, however, it is the job of developmental educators to insure that students meet them."

Developmental education programs permit professors teaching college-level courses to maintain high academic standards since students can develop the requisite skills needed in a separate developmental course or an adjunct academic support activity that is paired with the college-level course. Without such learning services colleges would admit the same students, and professors would be forced to teach classes with a much wider range of abilities represented but without any resources for students needing extra help. This in turn would lower the quality of education offered to the entire student body.

Belief #3. Raising admission standards will eliminate the need for academic assistance and developmental studies. ***False.*** On the contrary, as entrance standards are raised, faculty expectation levels rise even more quickly. Recently when entrance standards were raised for the California State University system, the mathematics department on one campus raised their required pass rate for the departmental screening test even higher. More students were placed into the developmental courses AFTER the increased entrance standards than before.

Academic assistance and developmental courses have always been offered at American colleges for the past 100 years. In addition, academic assistance centers are generally designed to help all students, regardless of their previous academic performance levels, to improve their learning mastery and grades in present courses.

Belief #4. Developmental education and academic support programs cost too much. ***False.*** The cost of ignorance and drop outs is higher. Good academic support and developmental education programs promote higher reenrollment and retention rates for students. For example, data studies at the University of Missouri-Kansas City suggest that for every dollar invested in the Supplemental Instruction (SI) program, the institution receives between $1.5 and $2 due to a higher rate of reenrollment on the part of SI participants. Often learning centers should be center pieces for effective campus-wide student retention programs.

Belief #5. With the temporary rise in the total number of high school graduates, developmental students are not a high priority for recruitment and retention anymore. ***False.*** The increase in high school graduates is temporary. Some college administrators want to recruit the higher number of average and above average high school graduates who are being produced by a temporary increase in the number of high school graduates. These administrators reason that they can theoretically recruit the average and above students and eliminate the need to deal with developmental level students. National reports from various sources agree that one-third to one-half of all first-time, full-time first year students need developmental courses in reading, writing and/or math. What institution can afford to send away or attempt to replace one-third of its entering class?

Belief #6. It is more appropriate, cost-effective, and efficient if all developmental course work is conducted at the two-year college level rather than at the four-year institutions. ***False.*** While a nice theoretical concept for state legislators, most students cannot afford to move or commute long distances to community colleges for the needed course work. The nontraditional student of five to ten years ago IS the traditional student of today. At UMKC the "average" student is 29 years old, has one or more dependents, enrolls in nine credit hours, and works half to full-time.

Belief #7. Blaming and punishing the people or parties responsible for producing developmental students will help the situation. ***False!*** It is very popular to blame the high schools and parents for producing a generation of developmental students. As a culture, America spends a great deal of time in affixing blame for social ills. However, blaming does not solve problems. Rather than directing energy to fixing the problem, it fuels more anger. Requiring students to pay triple tuition for developmental courses or sending invoices to pay for the cost of providing developmental courses of students back to high schools from where they graduated will generate more anger among all parties rather than bringing them together to solve the problem.

Belief #8. The Federal Government will no longer be the driving force for providing policy leadership and financial funding of grants for education. ***True!*** Due to massive education cuts to help ease the federal budget crisis and the decision by the new Republican majority to make block grants to states of the remaining federal funds, individual institutions will need to develop relationships with their state departments of education in order to pursue the limited grant dollars available.

Responding to the Current Education Environment

Rather than reacting to others, we must choose own actions. But, before considering what specific actions to take, an understanding of the principles that are driving the current environment is needed. That is what the first portion of this article addressed. After developing some level of understanding of the current environment, the next place to turn is to see if there are basic principles that can guide my choice of future actions. That is where Steven Covey's book, Seven Habits of Highly Effective People fits with this discussion. Covey interviewed many successful people in order to understand if there were basic principles that helped guide their lives.

His qualitative research identified the following seven: 1. Be proactive 2. Begin with the End in mind 3. Put first things first 4. Think win-win 5. Seek first to understand . . . Then to be understood 6. Synergize 7. Sharpen the saw

Developmental educators can use these seven principles to help guide our actions as we improve our ability to provide access, equity and success for our students.

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